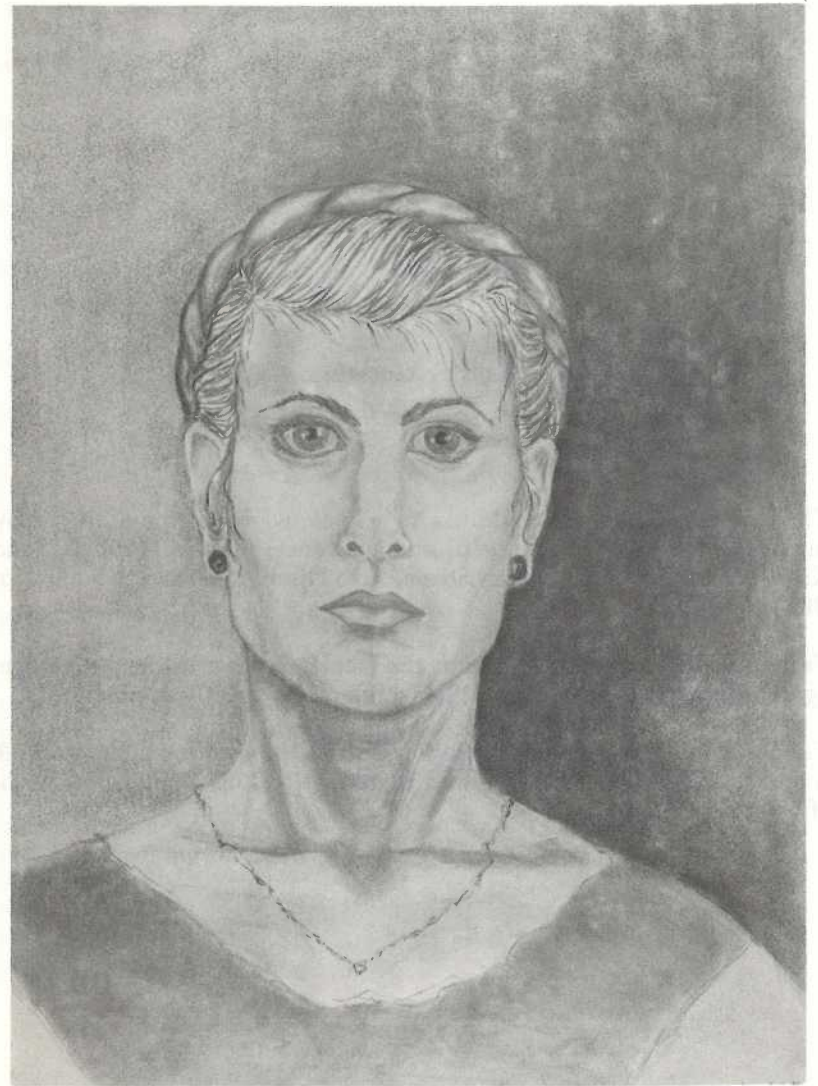


Photo By: Susan Gotta

THE CURRY ARTS JOURNAL
1986



Drawn By: Susan Gotta

EDITOR:

Patrick Gustafson

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THE SPY

An agent was assigned
to get a job done;
He was ordered to find
A fugitive on the run.

Many people would agree,
this sleuth was the best on the force;
It was easy to see
That he never went off course.

The inspector worked by night
And toiled throughout the day,
Until he caught sight
Of his highly elusive prey.

He devised a master plan,
Using all that he knew,
To follow his man
while staying out of view.

His plan did not miss
For quite some time,
but soon I did notice
The defender of crime.

With the inspector I toyed,
But no matter how I tried,
I could not avoid
Being followed stride by stride.

It was totally absurd,
But I attempted to stray;
I was quickly injured,
And could not get away.

I find it hard to believe
That this can be,
Yet I am relieved—
The spy of love caught me.

ARTIE TEFFT

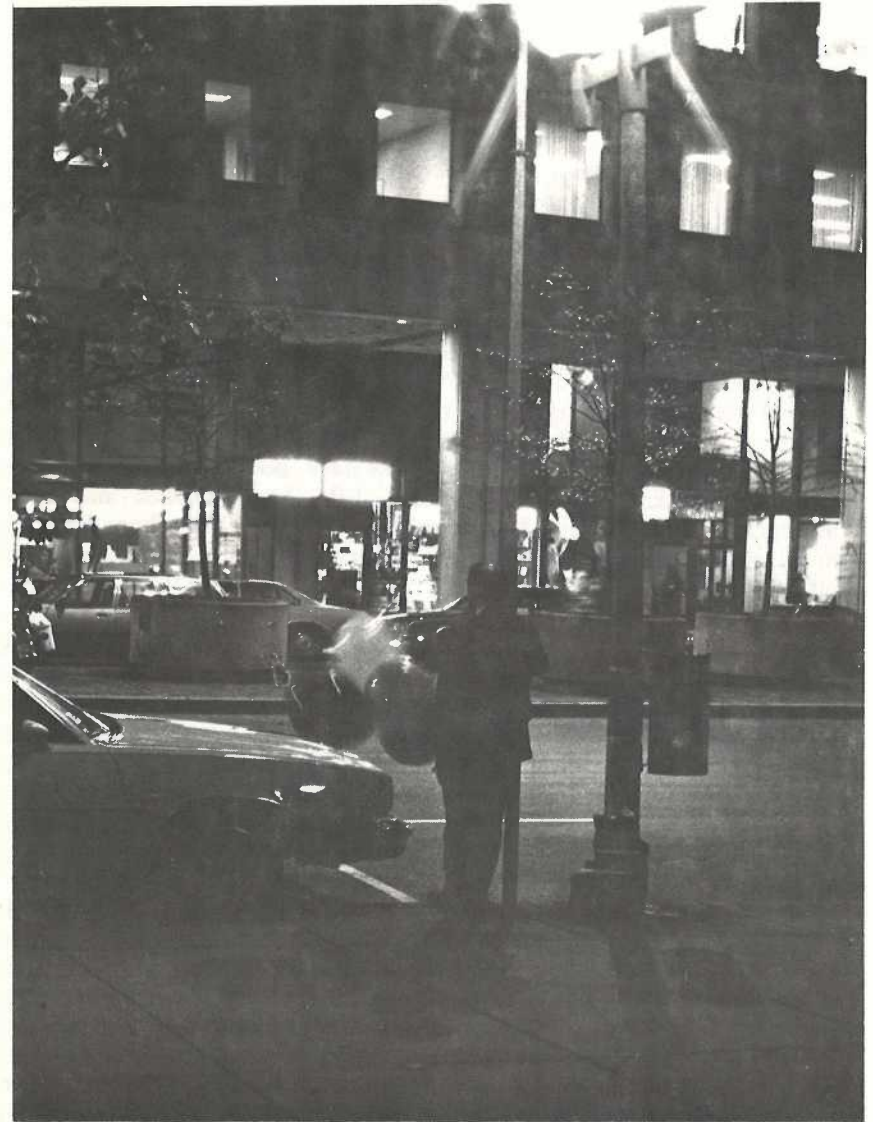


Photo By: Belinda Jentz

GRAMPS

When I was a boy, Gramps used to cut my hair. In fact, my earliest memory of Gramps is me sitting in my grandparents' kitchen back on old Madison Avenue getting a haircut. Yup, I sure recall those days. For as long as I can remember, up until I was maybe thirteen or fourteen, every three months or so, on a Saturday morning, I was carted off to my grandparents' house for a haircut. I'll never forget those days. Boy, I get a warm feeling inside me thinking about them now. Like an old black and white photograph, yellowed and frayed at the edges over time, those Saturday mornings are coming back to me as I sit here, my eyes beginning to water, but only a little.

Father Murphy is mumbling something in Latin. We younger generation Catholics have no idea about this Latin mumbo-jumbo, but we accept it because it's traditional religion, appropriate I guess, It's the clanking of the gold urn around that brings me out of my trance. That and the sickly sweet, nauseating, smell of the burning incense. Lord, old Murphy, the windbag, is in a cloud up there. I can barely see the altar. I wonder how he can breathe? My eyes are starting to really tear up from the spreading fog and festering fragrance.

Madison Avenue. Thank God they moved away from there. Same old story. Live in a house for thirty some odd years and then the neighborhood goes to hell. Goddamn spics and greasy PR's, as Gram calls them, move in and ruin the place. Property gets runs down, windows broken first, then boarded up. Broken beer bottles all over the sidewalks and street. That's how it looked their last few years there. Like I said, thank God my parents talked them into selling and moving closer to us, where it's safer, not to mention nicer. The downfall of a neighborhood comes in waves, you understand. To listen to Gram tell it, it's as if she has it down to a science, a course of study, and believe me, this is one story I have heard plenty of times. I'm dying to tell her that in old age her record has begun to skip with increasing frequency, but I would be wasting my breath; most things go over her head as it is.

Her, and I loosely make reference to gender, alleged singing is grating on my already frazzled nerves. In my humblest of opinions, her voice lacks the range of total color to make it consistently bearable. The only way I can take her noise is if I come in here expecting to laugh at how miserable she is, but laughing is the last thing anyone will do in here today. I'll have to ask mom what the organ lady's name is so I can upgrade this hatred to a more personal level. I wonder how come no one has registered an official complaint about her belching to music yet? Then again it would be very Christian like of everyone not to mention how utterly pathetic she is. You know, listening to her is supposed to make us all thank God that our throats weren't torn out at an early age and used for pin cushions for years before being replaced, rendering our voices like hers. After she finishes this lengthy number we can finally sit down again and be prepared for at least twenty minutes of soul-saving sermon from Father Murphy.

Haircuts. At least they were free back then. Of course Gramps was an amateur in every sense of the word. Hell, you could hardly call a man a professional if he only knew how to give crewcuts. Oh, I nearly forgot about all the grunt and jarhead barbers in the military. It makes me smile to think about it now, Gramps and his art of crewcutting. God, how did I ever survive those years? My brother and I must have been the only kids around still getting crewcuts in the early seventies. We are not ones to be mistaken for trend setters of our generation either; fashion plates we are not. Jeezo peezo, I don't remember why I put up with that routine for so long, and if Gramps hadn't had that first stroke, who knows how long it would have continued.

It's strange, how I'm thinking about all this, especially in church. My mind has always wandered in church though, and I guess today is no exception. Having to stand up after a, let's see, according to my watch, twenty-four minute and eleven second sermon makes me feel quite dizzy. I wonder how the sermon was other than long? Father Murphy began with, "Born in County Cork, Ireland. . ." and this is when he lost me. I only caught brief passages of his sermon, but from what I heard there is no question in my mind that Father Murphy was relying on the standard outline for sermons of this nature. As usual, he was as basic as his black garb. I drifted in long enough to hear "A good man, devoted husband, father, and grandfather. . . hard working provider. . . and, good Christian and follower of Christ." I'm sure, back at the house after this is all over, someone will be talking about how beautiful, how moving, how utterly inspiring it was. I almost let a laugh slip out. Sometimes I just picture little balls of dust popping out of Father Murphy's mouth when he speaks. You know, like when the Three Stooges ate the cake made out of pillow stuffings and then belched and coughed up feathers for the next half an hour. To this day, the Stooges still break me up.

"The first thing that happens", says Gram, staring off to a spot somewhere above and beyond my head, her two lumpy and arthritic hands resting on her cane," is that the older people begin to die off, or moving to Florida. It doesn't really matter which. That property gets sold for cheap, because that's all those people can afford. You get your first few ethnics in, and before you know it, it's little Mexico, grease balls running wild in the streets. You remember how your grandfather hated them running around our end of the dead end street? Well, I sure do. In just a short time, and it doesn't take long these days, the neighborhood is horse dung. That's just a clean way of saying you know what, shirt without the 'r' in it. 'Figure it out for yourself' is what Gramps used to say, God rest his soul. I'll tell you, it seems like every one of them Putrid Ricans is related somehow or another, and they all come to live with their relations. At any time, day or night, they're out on the streets, congregated on the corner smoking, drinking, and listening to the God awful trash music of theirs. All the young men shirtless, no meat on their bones, in those new fad designer jeans that cost more than they can afford, and pointed boots for killing rats and roaches that infest their houses, all acting how the kids say, macho, for those spico Spanish sluts that strut around with their skirts too tight, heels much too high for plastic shoes, especially when they each cake so much make-up on their faces. That's exactly what happened to Madison Avenue, you know."

Thank you, grandmother dear, is what I say in my mind, but may I ask, what did you think of selling to a Portuguese family? Do you feel you contributed to the downfall of the old neighborhood, or was it too late by then to care? Were you concerned about upholding some ridiculous standards, or just about your getting out? Prejudice is a strange thing. It festers in all of us, even in sweet old grannies.

Listening to this ugly old hag sing again reminds me of why I refuse to come to this church. Only special occasions can get me to set foot in here. I really dislike this particular church, but it's the closest one to our home; we're in its parish. No one in my family likes this church. Not even Dad, and if he weren't married and father to six children, he could have been a real contender for Pope. The priests are long winded and full of hot air here, and talk about boring sermons, these clowns take the cake. I've always had the feeling that if you cut Father Murphy in half, two hundred pounds of dust would spill out. This place and these people make coming to mass a real chore, which defeats the purpose. I'll have to remember to write the bishop a letter or something, maybe even go as high as the Pope himself, but he's probably too busy condemning abortion to be concerned about boring priests. All I know is I have good reason to go elsewhere on Sunday rather than coming to Saint Boredom of the Cross.

The smell, I almost forgot about the smell. How could I remember having my head and hair raped and nearly forget the smell? For some reason, certainly not for sanitary purposes, Gramps always insisted upon giving haircuts in the kitchen. I can hear the sound of the electric shears buzzing, feel them mow the hair from my head in neat rows and watch it all fall to the floor in small piles. I never felt comfortable accepting Gram's offer for a marmalade and butter sandwich for lunch after a haircut. Little hairs, my hairs, without fail, always seemed to get into everything — my glass of milk, on my plate; and as if orange marmalade wasn't stomach-wrenching enough, throw in some freshly cut hair for nutrition.

None of this comes close to matching the odor of my grandparents' kitchen though. The curse of every came-over-on-the-boat Irish immigrant's kitchen is the rank odor of corned beef and cabbage. In that kitchen were thirty years of constantly cooked slop, the foul reeking stench long since absorbed permanently into the walls, curtains, carpeting, and floors. To this day, thanks to that kitchen, I can't even look at corned beef and cabbage and not feel nauseous.

Father Murphy led the congregation down the aisle and through the doors before disappearing. There is no socializing after this mass. Everyone heads for the vehicles they came in. Riding in the car now, I have no idea how to follow this road. It simply winds itself around the grounds in a maze. Great for business I imagine; people getting lost, trapped in the maze, starving to death. This is it too, the end of a very long and trying morning. I didn't even notice a trace of strain on the faces of those six clods in the dark blue monkey suits when they had to lift the box. I wonder if you weigh more or less with all the fluids they have to inject you with? I guess it doesn't really matter. At least it's nice out, cool and not too humid for the middle of August. Beautiful if it could have been a hundred and ten in the shade; we could all watch the old people faint away from the heat, and in a few lucky cases, even get to watch as they wilted in the blazing sun. Someone yells, "Hey buddy, dig a couple more holes for these old farts will ya? Plant them anywhere, no one really cares where to tell you the truth."

I have to get my suit cleaned soon. I sweated in it profusely the night of the spring semi-formal back in early May, and today certainly makes a good dry cleaning a necessity. I wonder what Gramps was doing that night while I was out making a fool of myself on the dance floor and not really caring about it? Probably in the home listening to Gram talk about the downfall of the old neighborhood. It makes me sad to think of how long it must take old people to fall asleep at night. They must lie there for hours on their old bones, counting the minutes off their lives instead of sheep, the whole time wondering if there will be another morning for them, hoping to get another chance to open their eyes and see in a new day. Anyway, I know where Gramps is today.

The priest is finally done. God, look at Gram cry, and Mom too. This is the part that really gets to me. All this time trying not to think about it, trying for some unknown reason not to cry. Everyone all around me is crying their eyes out, blowing their noses like a flock of Canadian geese, and all I can do is stare at the open grave. I wonder how they lower the casket into its eternal resting place? Probably got some kind of machine or something. I can imagine eight maintenance grunts attempting to lower it by hand, struggling, sweating, swearing, and finally just letting it drop with a crash into the earth.

Time to go now. Everyone is touching the coffin one last time and mumbling their goodbyes. I am always lost here. No help. It's my turn, oh God. I'm sorry for not crying, Grams. I, I'm sorry for not coming to visit more often over the last few years. No excuses, I should have made more of an effort. It was just too easy to stay away, know what I mean? No matter now, sorry. I'm sorry I got too grown up, too old too soon, to tell you that I Loved you, like when I was a little boy. Well, goodbye Grams. Oh, hey Grams, if you can hear me, one more thing. Thanks for all those haircuts, Grams. You can give me a crewcut anytime. I love you Grams, you and those damn silly looking crewcuts.

PATRICK GUSTAFSON



Photo By: Paul Devlin

A WARRIOR

An Indian upon a hill, a fall night, a blackened sky —
enveloping his senses. . .

Ah. . . my people, my tribe,
do not look at me as though I were a failure.
I am your chief!
I am your warrior!

The sun sets slowly in the west,
A pinkish glow spots the already darkened fall sky,
As a chill rushes through the air.

Some warrior I turned out to be.
Oh, Gods in the heavens, look at my people,
My people,
They are no longer MY PEOPLE.
They are not even their own people. . .
They are people belonging to the white man.

White men,
they are not people.
They raise my people as they would their cattle;
Only they will not slaughter us.
Perhaps we would be better off dead.
For so long the white man has lived off us —
why not then feed on us?

We, my people,
My dear fallen tribe,
Have been degraded.
We are nothing in this world.
We are nothing to the white men.

The sky is now a complete darkness —
no glow,
a deep blue hole,
in which stars seem to fade farther. . .

You too, my heavens,
Will no longer look upon this disgrace.
All you Gods up in the heavens—
You would abandon us?
Some warrior I turned out to be.
My head so heavy with grief,
I shall never hold it proudly again.

My people. . .
We should have fought harder,
Fought to our deaths for our rights,
For our freedom.
Now we live shamefully off of the white man,
On reservations, owned like dogs.
So shamefully. . .
We have given up everything,
Our culture, our traditions, our morals,
Our pride.
Our Indian pride!

A poor old Indian chief, recounting old memories
As salty tears run down his chilled, scarred face. . .

My father—now there was a warrior.
He wore his colors with pride.
His people were workers,
all of them.
They had respect,
Respect for their warrior chief,
Respect for their elders, their Gods,
Respect for themselves.

Where has that respect gone?
To the white men.
The white men,
They do not understand the wrong they have done,
All they have taken from us.

They tell us we are ungrateful.
What have we to be grateful for?
They teach us their schooling,
Their faith, their laws.
They give us their food, their clothing,
Their poisonous drinks.
From this, what do we have?
We have poverty.
My people have become lazy drunks,
Disrespectful, filthy, disgraceful.
They have nothing to live for.
For them, there is no future,
No struggle for survival,
No need for unity.

Ah. . .my fallen, misled people,
You will never know the anguish
which tortures my weary soul.
There are no Gods looking over us.
All have turned their backs to us.

You are no longer my people,
For what am I,
But a senile old Indian?
No longer a strength,
No longer a man. . .
There is no one to turn to,
But the white man. . .

A dark fall night
No stars in sight
A little old man upon a hill
Sits contentedly still
Disturbed by stalky men dressed in white
Who take him away on a chill fall night.

DEE DEE GRIGNAFFINI

rain that should be snow
drops splash against the cold ground
fog rising through air. . .

rain

wind
warmer air sprinkled
sunshine from a blue sky
through my hair. . .blown dry

BETH DIMOCK

ONES: DESCRIPTION OF A PLURAL NOUN

they are not alone
existing singularly, together
as an individual whole
they may be only, or
they may be the,
they're always ones
together we group them,
ones, they are not alone

BETH DIMOCK

ARE YOU THERE

The window separated Sam from the fall weather outside his hospital room. But, the chill hugged his body as he stood staring at the season acting out its personality. Outside, wind and rain were mixing together to torment those that were entering or exiting the hospital. This amused Sam briefly until he noticed an oak tree on the grounds.

The tree stood strong and solid and its branches stretched in every direction. But it was the lowest branch that Sam paid particular attention to. For the leaves of the branch were being pulled from it by the wind. Then they would float through the air and gently fall to rest in a stream which would carry them away into a gutter. It was this string of events that Sam felt a part of.

A.I.D.S. had given Sam the ability to create meaning for what he saw. The leaves he watched falling from the tree were inconsequential to the tree's existence. Once they were gone the tree would stay the same. Sam suffered for the leaves. For he, too, was being pulled away from a tree that would stay the same once he was gone.

Sam's life had moved into its final moments. Suffering was all that was left. His body suffered from the disease. His heart suffered from the loneliness brought on by being deserted by his family and friends. He knew he would not see the seasons change as he turned from the window.

Sam had no visitors. Most of the hospital staff refused to go near his room. As a matter of fact, most people walked on the opposite side of the hall when they passed his room. The doctors and nurses who did have the courage to enter wore protective clothing. This hindered Sam from distinguishing male from female. So he tried to talk to them to tell the difference. But their voices were so muffled that he wondered if they were even human. Soon he gave up on communication and simply watched them do whatever they had to do.

The night of Sam's death was an ordinary night in the hospital: babies entered the world, bones were fixed, cuts were stitched and doctors smoked their cigarettes. But, in Sam's room, there was something happening that was out of the ordinary — or was it?

Sam lay falling into his final sleep. His vital signs gave all the evidence that was needed to prove this, so a priest was summoned to give him his last rites. This priest, being of sound mind and healthy flesh, refused to enter the room of the soon-to-be deceased. His overly large body dressed in black, blocked the white light in the hallway from entering the threshold of the room. As he began to mumble the words only the deceased should hear, Sam awoke with a dreadful fright. His time had come and he had nothing to wear. He immediately got out of his bed and headed for the door. He pardoned himself as he walked through the priest.

He reached the elevator and took it to the lobby. He next took to the street, walking, in search of something that fit him.

A short way down his path he ventured upon a stream, the flow of which was blocked by a large amount of silver and gold oak leaves. He felt inclined to follow this stream and did so. He soon came to its end. But what a peculiar end he did see. The leaves were being set free from the stream to find their way back to the trees. He stood perplexed by this until a gentle breeze spoke to him. "You see, no leaf is ever forgotten. This is the forest where dead things grow." Then, through the soles of his feet, a tingling sensation began to grow. It rose up inside him until it reached his head. Then he too was gone to the place where the forgotten leaves grow.

LOGAN DUBELL

A PERFECTLY NORMAL AMERICAN FAMILY

It didn't come all at once; but where it did come from no one knew. Was it something from the past? Something from the present? Something preconceived? A physical disorder? a mental disorder? Was there a cure or was it hopeless? None of them knew. All they knew was that their mother, wife and friend was not herself. She had a ghostly look about her. A pale, thin being had taken over her healthy, vibrant, intelligent mind and body. And now she was on her way back to Emerson for the "treatments". No one must find out! She'll lose her job. They'll think she's crazy. A cover must be made up because no one will understand. They'll all say she's nuts! Why? Because.

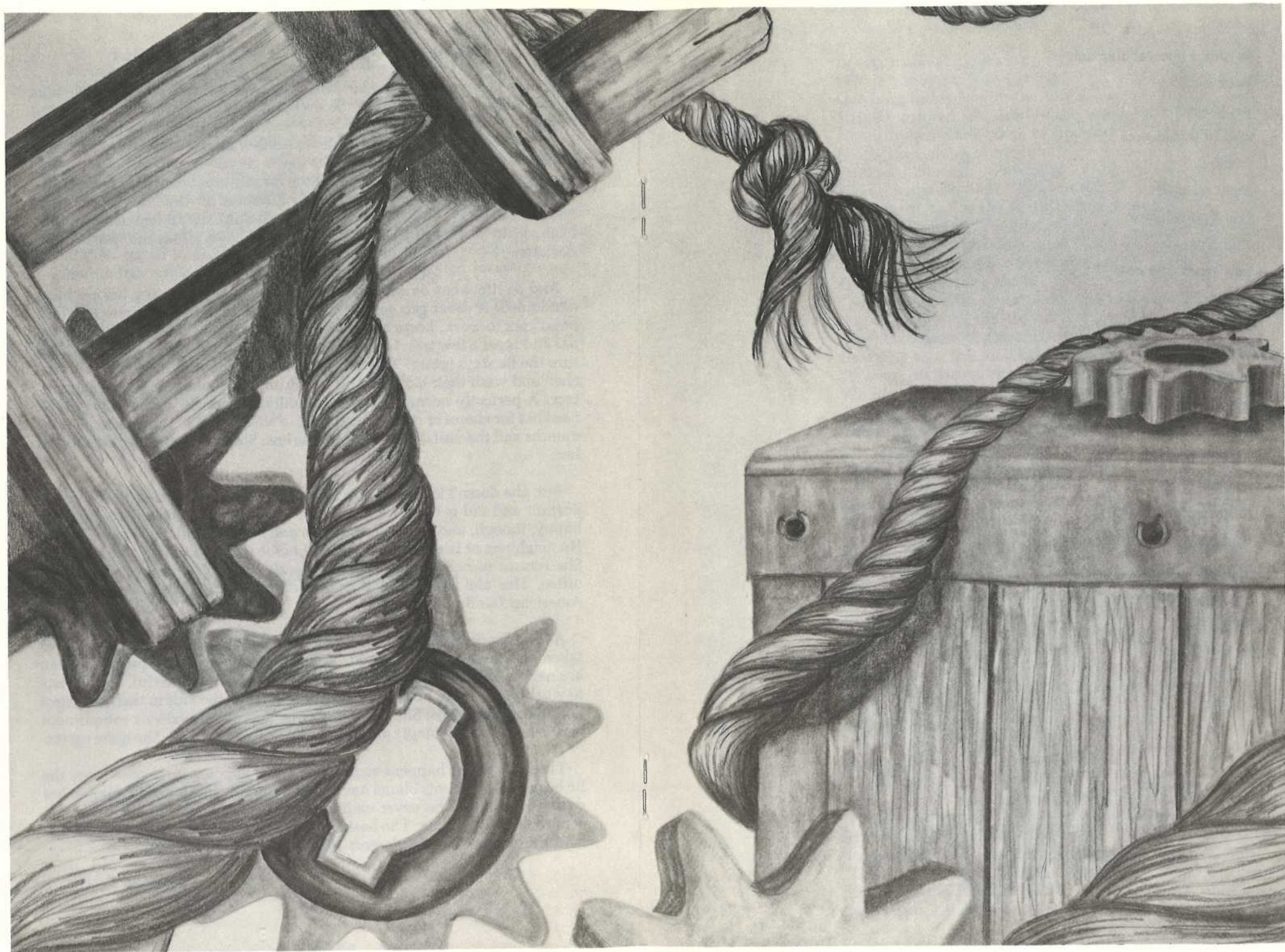
And so life went on as usual while she was away having her problem bandaged. It never gets solved, just put on hold until next time. Her husband goes to work, keeps all his appointments, reads *the Wall Street Journal* and tapes a few television specials on the VCR. And of course he makes sure the lie stays intact. The kids go to school, feed the dog, clean the kitchen and wash their clothes. And of course they make sure the lie stays intact. A perfectly normal American family. Nothing's wrong. They don't need her for chores or rides or anything, or so she thinks. Time passes, weeks, months and the visits to see her become less. She was right; they don't need her.

But, she doesn't know she was right. Her memory is gone. All the unimportant and sad events of a past time, a past life are washed away. She's happy, though, and so are her children and her husband. She's home again. No neighbors or friends found out where she was and the lie was a success. She returns to her job and her housework. Her husband stays late at the office. Her children forget about feeding the dog. A perfectly normal American family. Nothing's wrong.

A few friends wonder what's wrong with her when she forgets trips they've taken or places they've eaten at, but not enough to get suspicious. There are new memories made and for now everything is wonderful. She reports to work on the nose, buys all the groceries, drives the kids to their activities and makes the meals. She keeps everyone happy! Her friends compliment her on her beautiful family and handsome, loving husband. She quite agrees.

Then one day it happens again. The ghost appears. And once more the lie begins. Her parents blame her loving husband. Her husband blames her devoted parents. The never ending circle begins again. The children accept their daily routine. The husband thinks up a story to tell the neighbors. And the doctors. . . the doctors reach for the bandaid box.

SUSAN F. GOTTA



THE ACT

It was a spectacular act,
your best,
people say—
and how did you
make it
seem so real?
Did you rehearse
that line—
you know the one—
the one that makes
young girls cry?
But, we know—
don't we—
who it was directed at. . .
don't we?
why didn't you
just tell me?
It hurt more,
finding out like this,
through your act—
oh, and it was spectacular,
your best—
you know.

MELINDA SCHOFIELD

A WIND

a wind that threatens to drive
the warmth from uncovered ears
and nose. no number of layers can guard
against the gushes of winged ice

BETH DIMOCK

THE LOVERS

Lovers came to Janikawa
Where young Janikawa stood
Catching trout deep in the forest,
Striped, colored fish deep in the wood.
Hand in hand they came to find him
Hidden by young evergreens.
Janikawa knew their wedding
Would begin the next day evening,
Fire-preparing for the south Path wedding.
He was fishing for his gifts,
Food fit for the wedding feast.
When they had each other greeted,
Cautious, Janikawa asked,
"You are not with the grandmothers?
You are not with the old braves?"
(For the custom of the tribe was
Learning thus the married ways.)
"We are not there with the old ones.
We have seen their wedded ways.
Are there not some other ways
You have seen in all your travels?"
Janikawa answered slowly,
Lifting lines out of the water,
Lifting lines to check for fish:
"I was given in my travels
Visions of a youthful chief,
Wandering, finding roasting salmon
At the time of season's turning,
spring becoming fruitful summer.
He took salmon like a thief
But he dropped the hot fish burning,
Falling down beneath his breech cloth,
Burning, searing, paining him.
This much have I seen in travels."
Then the youthful bridegroom answered,
"We know pain, young Janikawa.
Tell us of the pain we feel.
Tell us how the pain is healed."
Janikawa said, "The spirits silent
In the presence of the thief
Did not heal that pain and grief,
Though when many moons have passed
He will, fasting, find relief.
Pale and pained, he left the fish fire.
Then returned the rightful chieftain,
Owner of the fish and fire.
Never saw I such a warrior

As stood then before the fire,
 Tall and feathered like an eagle,
 Strong and peaceful with an eye
 Keen for forests and the sky.
 And beside him stood a woman
 Radiant as the sunlit dew,
 Supple, lithe, and wise her bearing;
 In her hands, a sacred pipe.
 They came where the fish was roasting,
 Circled round the salmon roasting,
 Saw a thief had touched their fish.
 He the great and rightful chief
 Lifted what the thief had broken,
 Threw it back into the water,
 Set the lines for other fish.
 She the great and rightful woman
 Took the pipe, filled it with willow,
 Lifted it North, South, East, West,
 Through it drew the sacred breath,
 Passed it to the rightful man.
 Only then and only then,
 Drew new fish out of the water,
 Cooked them for the evening feast."
 From the vision to the lovers,

Janikawa moved his eyes:
 "Taking her not understanding—
 This it is, to be a thief.
 Taking him not understanding—
 This it is, to be a thief,
 Though not all is understanding
 Folded in the wedding blanket.
 She still to four winds belongs.
 He still to four winds belongs."
 Janikawa raised his hands,
 Raised his hands and called the spirits,
 Who rustling round the forest pool
 Came to where the couple stood.
 First around the waiting woman
 Janikawa raised his hands;
 Through the forest came the great ones,
 Came as if at his commands.
 First the East Wind, daystar's brother,
 Spoke to the woman in eastern light,
 "I love you with perfect love."
 Then every wind, South, West, and North
 Came and spoke their deepest troth.
 So, too, stood the man receiving
 Through raised hands the winds' relieving

Of all pain or thought of thieving:
 "I love you with perfect love."
 Then the forest wrapped around them
 Blankets of the evergreens,
 And the forest air was colored
 From the rainbow of the trout,
 Double rainbow of the wedding.
 Then departing from the pool,
 The peaceful couple took their way.
 Thus Janikawa caught the fish,
 And brought them for the wedding day.

FRANCES MacPHERSON



Photo By: Paul Devlin

FRIENDS

My three friends

Me, myself, and I

I will never be alone

Always have someone to talk to.

THERESA BUSILLO

I LOVE YOU, MOM

I love you Mom

illegitimate, accident

the product of a union not meant to last

kept not discarded, nurtured and guarded

loved, and given a chance

BETH DIMOCK

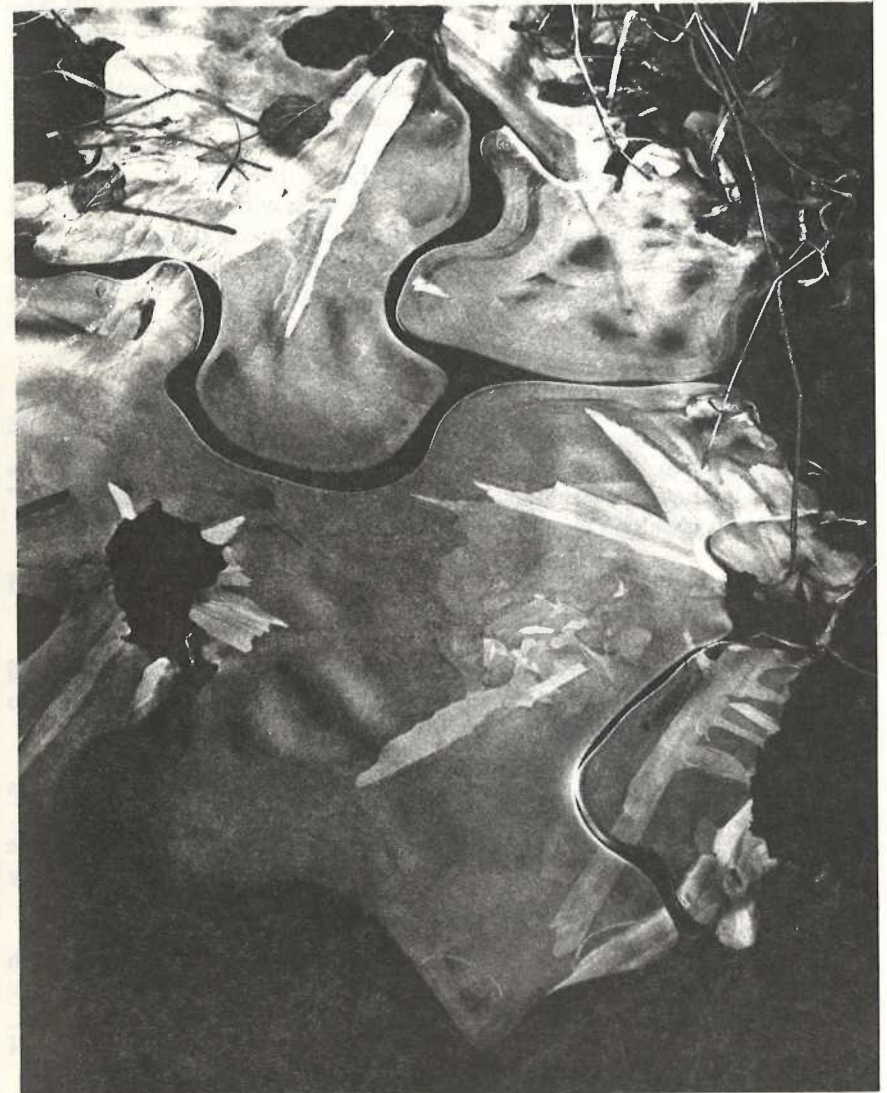


Photo By: Susan Gotta

"Can you spare some change," an old man on a street corner asked. He didn't direct his question to any one particular person. He just addressed the perpetually moving mass in front of him. If a hand came out of the mass and dropped change into his hand, he considered himself lucky.

Feeling a certain amount of weight in his hand he looked to see just how lucky he was. "That's not bad. Two and some change. Well, we'll just have to pay a visit to our friend Tim." Tim was the young man who worked at O'Brian's liquor store. He pointed his snorkel coat in the direction of the store and began remembering the taste of his favorite vice, Jim Beam's.

Opening the door set the bells to singing their only tune. This caused Tim to leave the back room. He half smiled when he saw the old man who had been coming into the store ever since he had been working there, enter. "Tim, it's been a lucky day. I'm here before noon." Tim shook his head and made a face expressing, "why". The old man went to the bottle of Mad Dog without even thinking of where it was. He gripped the bottle on the shelf with a thankful tightfulness.

He took the bottle from the shelf and headed over to the counter. "Tim, do you have a cigarette? I hate to drink without mixing the two tastes." Tim reached into his breast pocket and handed the old guy a smoke. As he did this he thought to himself, "I must have given him a hundred smokes." The old man took the cigarette and placed it somewhere in his coat.

"Thank you kindly. You treat me well, that's why I consider you a friend and give you my business." Tim nodded for the privilege.

After the sale had been rung up, the old man took his brown bag and headed through the door. He reached the street and decided he would go to his favorite drinking place.

The building he went to had been unoccupied by people for as long as he had been on the street. The only things living in it were not even human. Their names had been long forgotten; their faces long faded. They were dead to the outside world. They only knew themselves and that was very seldom.

He entered through the back of the building. He walked blindly through the decay of the years gone by. Only he and others like him would come here. The mere smell of the shit and garbage that lay rotting around him, would send another into fits of vomiting. But to him this was all part of what he was. He gave it no notice.

He passed a few rooms where figures were huddled together or alone. Some were huddled by fires others were just alone in the cold. They were other drunks or junkies who came here to drink or get stoned in the dark. They would just get high and float in the space their mind created to replace the one they filled. But he didn't care about them, his throat was getting dry.

He reached what he called his room. The only thing that occupied it was a couch that fit the decor of the decaying room. He settled himself on the couch and prepared for the coming of the booze. He took the cigarette from his pocket and searched himself for a match.

Next he cracked the seal of the bottle and twisted the plastic top off. He licked his lips in preparation for the only kiss he ever receives. The glass was cold to his lips but the liquor was warm to his throat. He held the bottle upright for what seemed a long time. Then he removed it from his lips and screwed the cap back on the bottle. He placed the bottle back into his pocket. He leaned back on the couch and enjoyed his moment of recognition with the dark.

The empty bottle lay just out of his reach. His snoring filled the room. A rat sniffing the hood of his snorkel coat woke him up. "Get the Hell off me, you wretched creature of the underworld. My flesh still belongs to me." He hit the rat and sent it squealing into the filth from where it came.

Walking out of the building he hoped the soup kitchen hadn't closed yet. While thinking about this he tripped over a piece of wood. "Damn, What a shitty thing to happen." He pulled himself up and walked over to the street lamp to see if he damaged anything. When he reached the lamp he looked down at his knees, since they took the force of the fall. But instead of seeing his knees he saw a unused instant lottery ticket. "Well, what has lady luck done for me? A bottle before noon and now perhaps a bottle instead of supper, or, is she just playing a dirty trick on an old bum?"

He began rubbing the ticket with his thumb. The first number he uncovered was ten dollars. Then ten thousand. Then twenty five, then ten again, then ten thousand, and then one dollar. "Well, lady luck, I have one more space to rub. Will you make me drunk or a rich drunk?" He slowly began to move his thumb across the space. He exposed the first letter, it was a T. "Oh my. What is this?" He couldn't wait any longer. He hurriedly scratched the rest. "Oh, the lord has replaced the lady." The number read ten thousand. He brought the card close to him and made sure no one had been watching him.

He immediately scurried back to his room in the abandoned building. He sat in the dark thinking of what to do. He decided that in the morning he would go to Tim and ask for his advice. After awhile he didn't care about dinner.

The next morning came and the old man went right to the liquor store. "Tim, Tim," he cried as he entered the store. Tim was busy stocking the shelves as the old man entered the store. He thought to himself that the man must have found some money for him to be in before eleven. "Tim, Tim, I'm rich, I found a ticket, money, lords lots of money. It's mine. I didn't steal it." Tim looked at the old man not understanding anything he had just babbled.

"Slow down, old man. What the hell are you mumbling about?" The old man reached into his coat and exposed the ticket. He had held onto it all night and it showed. The ticket looked old already.

Tim could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the ticket. "Damn, some fool sure doesn't know what he lost and you of all people found it. I'll be damned. The lord does work in mysterious ways. Well I'll call the lottery and get you the money. I'll just say you bought it here. Man, they are not going to believe this. Damn, I don't even believe this."

The old man stood staring at Tim. Then he asked, "Tim, my friend, could you lend me a bottle seeing that my credit just turned good?" Tim stopped by the shelf he was next to and grabbed a bottle of scotch.

"This one, old man, is on the house and I'll join you in a drink, I still don't believe this, shit."

Four days went by before a man came from the lottery to deliver the check. He wanted to have his picture taken with the old man, but the old man refused. He didn't want anyone to know he had this money and for good reasons. Disappointed, the man handed over the check and left. The old man took the check, folded it, and hid it somewhere in his coat. Then he went straight for the door. He didn't say a word as he listened to the same old tune.

His destination was the bank. The lottery man gave him a name of the bank that would handle the cash. But when he got there the teller wouldn't believe him. He called the security guard over to have him thrown out of the bank. When the bank manager heard the commotion he came over to see what the problem was. "Excuse me, sir, may I help you?" The old man was mad but he understood the situation. It's not every day a street person walks into a bank and asks to cash a check for ten thousand dollars.

"Yes, you can help me. I won this money and I want it." He showed the check to the manager. The man took it in his hands and examined it.

"Sir, please wait here for a moment". He left and went into his office. He closed the door behind him so the old man couldn't see what he was doing.

Fifteen minutes later the manager came out of his office. "Sir, I am so sorry for the inconvenience. You must admit, this is out of the ordinary. Please come with me and we'll see about putting the money to work for you." The old man followed the manager but he disliked his idea.

"I want the cash," he told the manager. The manager stopped and looked at the old man.

"Sir, a person in your position is hardly in any condition to handle that much cash."

"I want the cash. Give it to me and shut up." He said this because he knew it was the only way to make the man understand.

"Well, all right then I'll give you the money. Try to help these people and they spit in your face."

He left the bank laughing. He then went to an Army-Navy store and bought new jeans, underwear, boots, sneakers, a coat, a jacket, and a knap sack to put them in. The woman at the counter was sure he had just robbed a bank. But he assured her it was all right. He then went to a CVS and bought some shampoo, toothpaste, three toothbrushes, a razor, blades, shaving cream, and a comb. Again he had to reassure the sales person that his purchases were legitimate. After purchasing all his necessities, he went to the nearest hotel to get a room.

He entered the Hilton in hopes of making a scene. Just as he entered the door two young men grabbed his arms. "O.k., you bum, back to the street. You don't belong here. Shit like you belongs in the gutter." At this he kicked one of the young men in the knee and hit the other with the bag he was carrying. He then grabbed a large bill from his pocket and handed it to one of the young men.

"Here split this between the two of you and thank you for your hospitality." He then proceeded to the desk to get a room.

He had the same trouble convincing the desk clerk. "Look, you little shit, money talks, right? Well, I got an awful lot to say in my pocket. Here's just a little mumble to show you what I mean." He pulled a small wad of bills out of his pocket. This convinced the clerk to give him a room.

When he got to the room and went inside he remembered what he had been missing all these years. He next went immediately into the bathroom and turned the tub on. He was going to take a bath. He scrubbed for an hour. Then he got out of the tub and drained out the dirty water. While waiting for the tub to refill he looked at himself in the mirror. "You old coot, you're rich. Ha ha". Then he did a little dance out into the room and picked up the phone. "Yes, room service. Send up two of your best steaks to room Two twenty-two. Also a bottle of your best scotch. Yippie. I'm getting to like this." He hung up the phone and hurried back to his awaiting bath.

While letting the warm water stimulate his body a thought entered his mind. Leave the East Coast and go west. "What the hell. I've soaked all the luck out of the East that I possibly can and besides the beach is better on the feet than the pavement". This being decided he pretended the water against his skin was the Pacific Ocean.

The next day was like any other day for Tim. He came to the liquor store at eight forty-five. He opened the door to that same old tune and started to walk in. But this time something was different. The mail was here early. "That's funny. The mail doesn't usually get here until the afternoon. He picked up the envelope and noticed something else that was different. The letter was addressed to him. "That's strange, who would send me a letter here?" He walked over to behind the counter and sat on the stool. Opening the letter he found something even stranger. In place of a letter was cash. His jaw dropped. He took it out and spread it like a hand of playing cards. He couldn't believe it. When he counted the money out it he discovered he was four thousand dollars richer. Tim never did see that old man again.

In his new underwear and clothes he felt like a new man. No one on the plane knew of his past and he felt lucky about his future. He leaned over to the woman in the seat next to him and said, "Will you join me for a drink young lady? I feel lucky today." He laughed out loud as the plane soared into the sky.

LOGAN DUBELL

SENSATIONS

Ascending hills of rock,
From the beach, where his sneakers now float.
His bare feet tingle electrically,
Gingerly pressing small twigs of the pine.
Soft, green, rugs of moss sink under foot,
As he climbs the broad hill of the isle.
His foot falls on a splint of wood,
Which sparks his nerves to step again.
But his next step is met by an arch of surprise,
When an egglike, smooth stone soothes the bite.

JACK BUNNEY

UNCLE NORMAL

When my brother Mike was nine years old and I was eight, we did something that caused Mrs. Boucher to hate us for life. It only took the one incident for her to condemn us. Mrs. Boucher was the mother of our friend Gerry Boucher; she was also oldest sister to Norman. Norman was ten years older than Gerry and myself. At eighteen he was by far the biggest kid on the block. I call him a kid because he is mentally retarded and Mrs. Boucher used to send Norman out to play with us when he was visiting the Boucher family. If this seems confusing, imagine what it must be like to be retarded — the brain capable of operating only in super slow motion. I think Norman's relatives shared the responsibilities of caring for him, or in other words, they shipped their burden around to each other. At nine and eight years old we never suspected that there was anything really wrong with Norman; to us he was just bigger in size and somewhat slower mentally. At that age, no one has the insight to question the maturity and mental capacities of a big person.

The favorite game in our old neighborhood in the late 1960's, when we weren't playing some kind of ball, was what we simply called "army". At the time, if I had known about or understood the Vietnam War, I doubt I would have loved that game so dearly. In our youth, we failed to recognize the vast differences between innocent games of war and the utter horrors of real war.

We had the best army players of any neighborhood around. Ronnie Reagan would have surely been proud of us if he'd known that healthy, red-blooded eight-year-old American males loved to play army. In our game of war, there were no decomposing bodies, no young men lying about with flies and maggots feasting upon their spilled insides and bleeding guts. We only had to lie dead until a teammate tagged us or Mom called us home for dinner.

Gerry Boucher was by far, barring none, the greatest army player I ever had the pleasure of seeing. He had a speech impediment that for once in his life worked to his advantage; Gerry Boucher was a chronic stutterer. I imagine he would have gladly been only a mediocre army player if he could only have been free of his speech disorder. The reason Gerry was such an outstanding player was that in order to kill an opponent, you really had to shoot him dead, the literal equivalent of at least fifty live bullets riddling an enemy's body just to get him down. Guns were simply slices of wood and the sound of machine guns came from our own imaginations and throats. This was the key to Gerry Boucher's success. Because he stuttered, he could shoot more bullets for a longer period of time than any other person. He was amazing, precisely the reason he was always on the "Americans" team, and as everyone is led to believe under our present day conservative rule, the Americans are always the good guys and we never lose.

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No one liked to play army with Norman. He never would play dead when shot, and this was the worst sort of cheat imaginable; the entire precept of the game was willingness to be dead when you knew you were shot. We never understood why Norman cheated all the time. When we complained to our parents, they simply told us to be nice to Norman and make sure that we played fairly with everyone.

The entire incident that has left Mike and me on Mrs. Boucher's permanent hate list began with an innocent mistake. It happened after our very first encounter with Norman. Norman is, obviously, Gerry Boucher's uncle. Gerry, for some unknown reason, called him "Uncle Norman" at all times; he never referred to him as anything else. This struck us as odd because we knew that real uncles were older men and not just bigger kids who acted our age like Norman did; besides, it usually took Gerry a full minute to spit out the word "uncle" alone. The whole ugly situation began when Gerry introduced us to his uncle on a bright and sunny Saturday morning.

"This i ii is mmmmm mmm my Un Unnn Unnn Unnn Unccc Uncle NNNN NNN NNNNNN Norh Norhmm Norhamalll." What he was trying to say (Uncle Norman) and what sounds came out of Gerry's mouth were two completely different things. To this day Mike and I both swear that what Gerry Boucher said to us was not in fact, "Uncle Norman," but rather, "this is my Uncle Normal." To small boys who didn't know any better, Uncle Normal was as regular a name as any other. When we both started calling him "Uncle Normal," no one gave it a second thought, least of all Norman, who will certainly never be in a position to correct anyone. After the introductions were completed, we chose up sides for another game of army.

I no longer remember who was dead at the time, but our game of army that afternoon was interrupted for lunch. We broke camp with a verbal agreement to continue the war in an hour. After lunch Mike and I were tormenting the neighbor's cat when we decided to walk over to Gerry's house and get him. When we got there, we knocked on the door and woke the sleeping baby Boucher who immediately proceeded to scream. Since the baby, Mrs. Boucher was, in our collective opinion, quite the bitch. She was always yelling at Gerry and us to get out of the yard and to go play elsewhere. We never made the connection at the time between her ugly disposition and the new baby. When she arrived at the door with the screaming child in her arms and a very nasty look in her eye, we asked if Gerry could come out and play. Mrs. Boucher told us that Gerry was running an errand for her, which was probably just an excuse to get him away from the house so the baby could sleep and she could have some peace. Because we wanted to resume the war and were in desperate need of bodies, we inquired about Normal. While eating lunch we conferred and decided that a few dozen mud grenades would slow Norman down, and we were anxious to execute our new strategy.

Completely innocent, in unison, Mike and I asked Mrs. Boucher, "Can Uncle Normal come out and play with us?" Mrs. Boucher lost all control of herself; she snapped, her head and mouth began to twitch, and she even started to stutter herself. She yelled and screamed at us, she called us "brats," "little monsters," and even "bastards." Mrs. Boucher, babe in tow, chased us halfway around the block and home. It was too bad Gerry couldn't run with a football the way his mom could run with a baby in soiled diapers.

The immediate outcome of our mistake was that Gerry was not allowed to play with us for weeks, until his mother got sick of him hanging around the house making too much noise. She kicked him out of the yard the same day he took to having catches with himself by bouncing a baseball off the side of his house. After the incident, things remained the same between Gerry and us; in fact, he didn't even mind our calling Norman Normal in front of him. It appeared that his mother was the only one who couldn't control herself.

Neither Mike nor I understood the reasons for Mrs. Boucher's behavior at the time. We both made sure that we stayed clear of her for a good couple of weeks, although we secretly enjoyed her chasing us and failing to even come close to catching up.

Today of course we both understand the episode in its entirety; we can appreciate Mrs. Boucher's position with the new baby and her protective feelings about her retarded younger brother. In her mind we probably were two little monsters, that I will not deny, but in the particular case involving Norman, we did make an honest mistake; there was not an ounce of maliciousness intended. Mike and I, to this day, still consider the incident pretty funny. To us, because of that day, Norman will forever be Uncle Normal, and saying his name fifteen years later as we did when we were nine and eight still brings mischievous grins to our faces. Mrs. Boucher did not appreciate it when we made our mistake that afternoon and I wonder what she would think if she knew the entire thing has never stopped providing us with another source for amusement?

It had been at least ten years since either Mike or I has seen Uncle Normal. I can't even guess how many years had passed since I last thought about Normal. My inspiration for writing this story, which it truly was, came just a few short months ago. Mike and I were on our way home one weekend afternoon after a round of very frustrating golf. Mike was driving and I was adding up our score cards trying to think of a way to cheat and lower my score. Without warning, Mike abruptly pulled the car off to the shoulder of the road. When I looked up, he was already pointing to the little brook that winds past a house and under the road which we were on and then appears again on the other side of the street. It hit us both at the same instant; our memories were jolted into action.

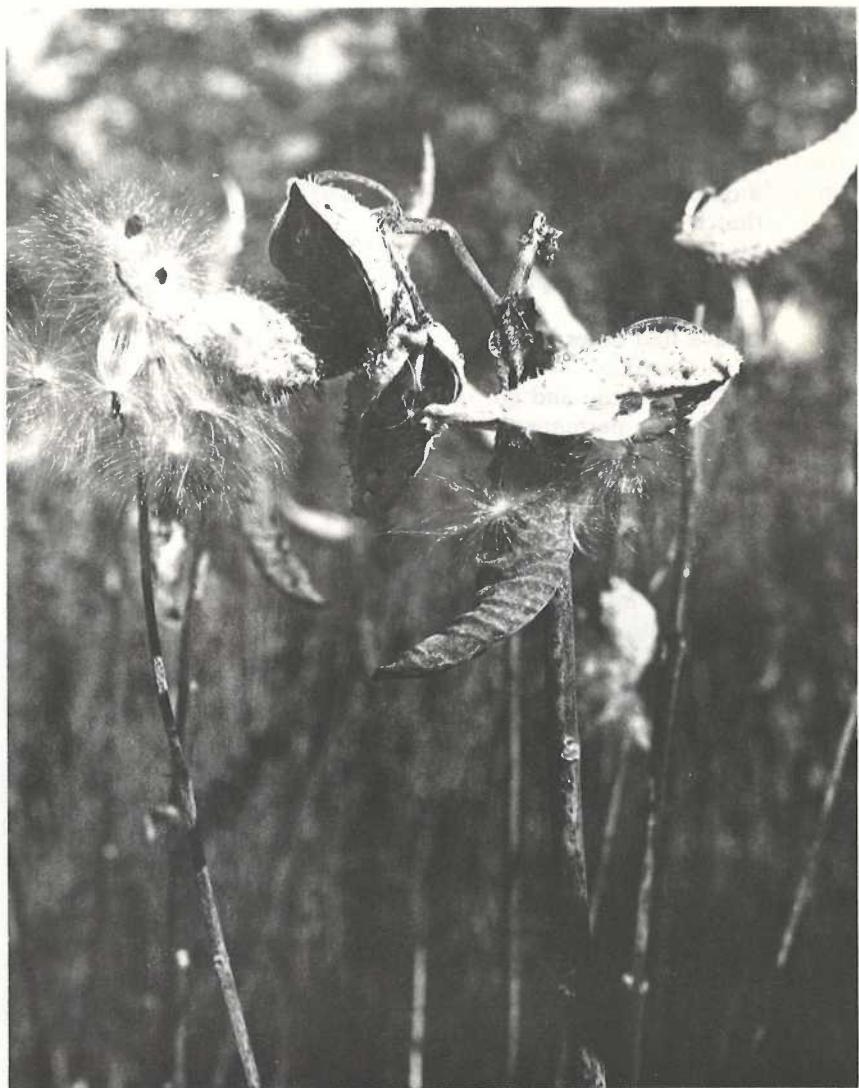


Photo By: Susan Gotta